



At the intersection of past and future— The Lab's archives

January 1, 2013



When most people think of the word “archives,” they tend to think of rows of dusty books and papers. In the case of the Laboratory’s archives, nothing could be farther from the truth. With its 15,000 square feet of records, technical papers, photos, and photographic negatives, it’s a bustling place that will get even busier as the Laboratory prepares for its 70th anniversary on April 5, 2013.

The LANL Archives staff typically handle about 60 requests a month for everything from [Freedom of Information Act](#) (FOIA) queries to calls from journalists and television producers.

“We also get requests from those who want to know about relatives who worked here during the Manhattan Project. However, most people back then were ‘rank and file,’” said Alan Carr, the Lab’s historian, “so we may not have a lot of information on them, but personnel files can be requested. Of course, those files are private, so people can request their own files, or if the person is deceased, a family member can request the

information as long as a death certificate is provided. If someone other than a family member wants a file, they'd need to request it under FOIA since we can't release that information without authorization."

In addition to the archives, the Laboratory also has a records center full of items that are less likely to be requested but which must be retained under a full records management policy that must conform to [DOE directives and requirements](#) and the Lab's own Quality Assurance Program.

"The record retention schedule varies tremendously, from months to thousands of years, depending on the type of information they contain," said Frank Garcia, with the Lab's Record's Management Services group.

"All those in possession of Lab records are required to determine their importance prior to destruction," said Garcia. "Whether people are moving offices, changing projects, or retiring, employees and contractors need to determine if they have anything that needs to be saved. If they're not sure, they can always get in touch with their organization's records point of contact."

"In fact," said Carr, "any time that people think they might be in possession of information that's important to the Lab, they can call on us to check. At one point, we discovered a collection of personal glass slides in someone's garage that related to the Lab's early days. We were happy to catalog them and protect them for future generations. All folks have to do is ask," he said.

While more than half of the records in the archive are nuclear-weapons related and classified, they remain a resource for Lab technical staff with the proper clearances. "We have information on work and experiments from the earliest days of the Lab, including three million radiographs that can be accessed if there is a "need to know" and security requirements are met. Many of our records preserve information that is of great importance to our research and the country, not to mention our developmental history as an institution," said Carr.

What distinguishes an archive from a library or other document-retention center? "While a library tends to make lots of documents available, they are usually published and created by others, while archives possess things that are unique, generally unpublished, and generated by the organization that retains them." For instance, the collection includes a memo on which J. Robert Oppenheimer, Manhattan Project scientific director at Los Alamos, signed his name. "Usually, he just initialed things," said Carr. Also held is a letter from Oppenheimer's insurance company on which he sketched out the structure of the organization that would eventually become Los Alamos National Laboratory.

While activities for the Lab's 70th anniversary are still in the planning stages, Carr expects the archives to play a major role as it accesses some of its more interesting items to share with the public.

For those not able to travel to Los Alamos to revel in the Lab's and the town's history, the archives has photos, videos, publications, and even live lectures for those who would like to request them.

Some of the live lecture titles include:

- A History of Los Alamos Laboratory
- An Overview of the Second World War
- The British Mission to Los Alamos

- The Role of Los Alamos in World War II
- Norris E. Bradbury, Mister Los Alamos

For more information on what the Archives has to offer, or take advantage of its services, write to history@lanl.gov or phone Carr directly at (505) 664-0870.

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